

ELLEN P. REESE (1926-1997):  
TEACHER, MENTOR, AND RESPECTFUL STUDENT OF  
HUMAN AND NONHUMAN ANIMAL BEHAVIOR

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Ellen Hayward Pulford Reese died peacefully in her home in South Hadley, Massachusetts, surrounded by the people and animals she loved, and bathed in the sunlight of an early April afternoon. She gave up the long fight against terminal emphysema on April 2, 1997. Ellie, as we all know her, spent her entire professional career at Mount Holyoke College, entering as a freshman in 1944, earning her BA in 1948 and her MA in 1954, and culminating 50 years later in her appointment as Norma Cutts Dafoe Professor of Psychology in 1994.

Ellen Pulford was a student when her future husband, Mount Holyoke professor Thomas W. Reese, established one of the first two introductory psychology laboratory courses built upon the Keller and Schoenfeld model. Both laboratories opened simultaneously at Columbia College and Mount Holyoke College in 1946. Ellie became a research assistant in 1948, and she became Mrs. Reese in 1949. Ellie devoted her energies both to her studies and to the establishment of this new laboratory. One can still feel the sense of excitement the laboratory engendered from viewing the old black-and-white photographs of the Reeses and their colleagues posing with B. F. Skinner on the steps of the Psychology and Education Building. During the 1951-1952 school year, Thom Reese received a Fulbright grant to teach at the University of Ankara, and the Reeses spent the year setting up the first psychology laboratory in Turkey.

For 21 years, Ellie served as assistant director and, later, director of the Psychological Laboratories at Mount Holyoke. Her laboratory manual, *Experiments in Operant Behavior* (1964), introduced many thousands of students to the laboratory procedures and prin-

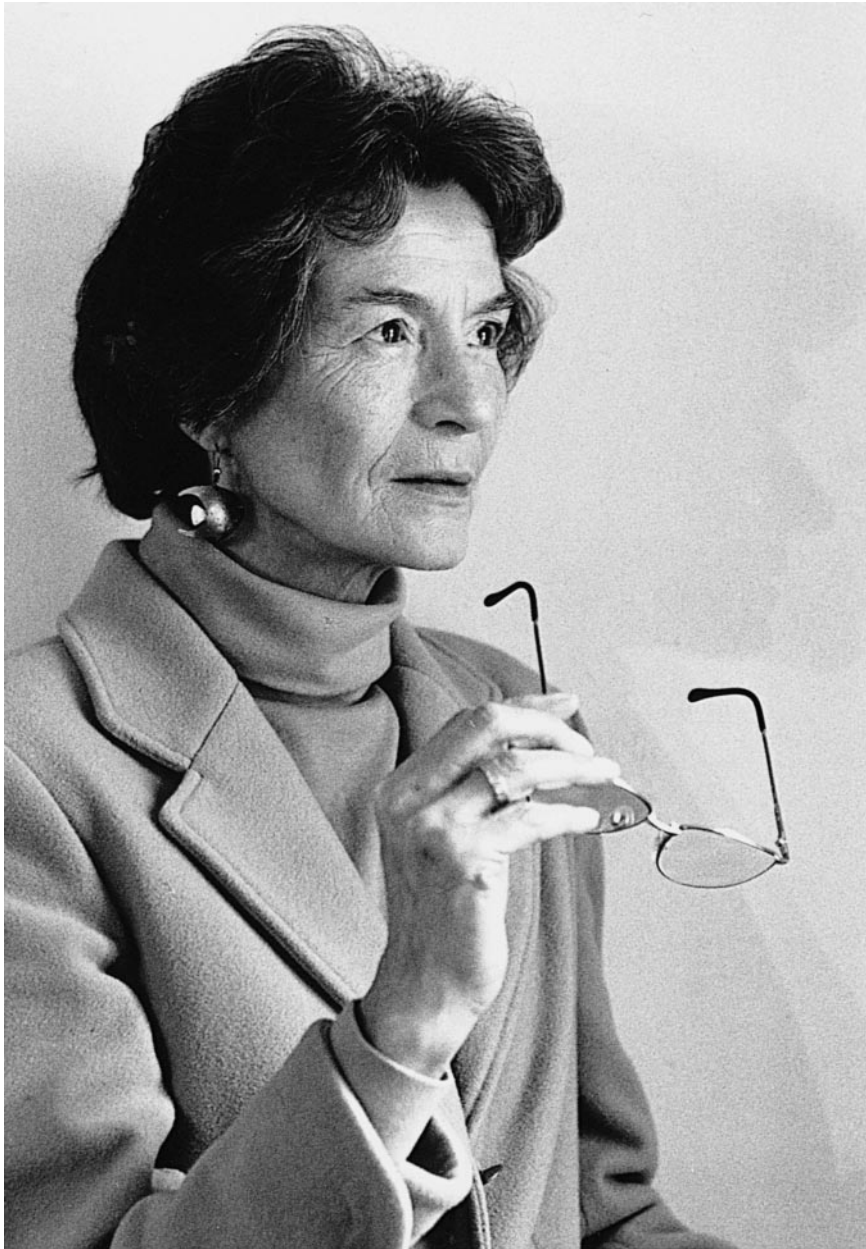
ciples of operant learning. It guided them through a series of exercises with a white rat or pigeon, and it included comparative data from several species. In this text students found instructions for building the requisite scientific apparatus from scratch, and they found 81 illustrations, most of which contained data obtained by her students.

Ellie was not interested in laboratory animals only to the extent that they could teach us principles of learning and their possible application to humans; she was truly interested in the behavior of the animals themselves. In her own research and teaching, Ellie worked with over 45 different species. She said that her interest in animals was evident in her childhood, when, by the age of 8, she had read every book on animals in the West Hartford Children's Library. She began her undergraduate education as a zoology major before switching to psychology.

Throughout her career, Ellie further expressed her interest in "nonhuman animals," a term upon which she insisted, through the rigorous avocation of breeding, showing, and training German shepherds. She was founder and former president of the Holyoke Dog Obedience Training Club and the German Shepherd Dog Club of Western Massachusetts. She often served as a judge at American Kennel Club sanctioned events. One of her dogs won the best-in-show award at the Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show at Madison Square Garden. After Bezel, the last of her German shepherds, died, Ellie sold her farmhouse in Granby and moved into a condominium complex in South Hadley. There she found it more convenient to share her smaller apartment with two felines, with whom she was endlessly fascinated. Among the usual professional memberships and affiliations she shared with most behavior analysts, Ellie further listed memberships in the Animal Behavior Society, Scientists Center for Animal

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Ellen P. Reese. (Photograph by Evalyn F. Segal)

Welfare, and Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.

The behavior of human animals was of interest to Ellie, too. Her book, *The Analysis of Human Operant Behavior* (1966), is a classic in the field of behavior analysis. This was one of the first books to describe the early research and widespread application of operant learn-

ing principles to education and therapy. By 1987 her book had been reprinted 19 times. The second edition of Ellie's book, published in 1978, was several times larger, reflecting the burgeoning of the field. It has been reprinted six times. Her continuing interest in human behavior is further exemplified by her collaboration with Beth Sulzer-Azaroff in the

1982 publication of an excellent laboratory manual, *Applying Behavioral Analysis: A Program for Developing Professional Competence*.

During her career, Ellie published over 30 books, chapters, and research articles, the latter of which are coauthored primarily with her undergraduate students. Her seven published educational films and videotapes are a tribute to her teaching skills. Her first film, *Behavior Theory in Practice* (1965), recruited a large and diverse international audience to the study of operant learning. The film, with its four 20-min sound and color reels, written and directed by Reese herself, was produced by Charter Oak Studios and Appleton-Century-Crofts. A press showing took place at Rockefeller Center in New York City. Over the past 32 years, that film has been shown during countless undergraduate and graduate courses in a wide variety of subject areas. It has been used regularly during preservice and in-service training in a vast number of educational and treatment settings.

In 1986 Ellie's lifelong dedication to education in psychology was formally recognized by the American Psychological Foundation's Award for Distinguished Contribution to Education in Psychology. In 1992 she was featured in the American Psychological Association Centennial Women's Heritage Exhibit honoring 100 women for contributions throughout the history of psychology. Ellie was a trustee of the Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies from 1982 to 1994. From 1973 through 1990, Ellie was recognized with positions of leadership within the American Psychological Association (APA), where she served on the Division 25 Executive Committee during three different terms, the Committee for Women in Psychology (1979–1981), and the Committee on Animal Research and Experimentation (1984–1986). In 1984 she was elected President of the Association for Behavior Analysis International. In 1990 she was elected President of Division 25 of APA.

At her official retirement in 1994, the Mount Holyoke board of trustees voted to name the Psychology and Education Building the Ellen and Thomas Reese Psychology and Education Building. Many of her colleagues and former students came from all parts of the country to participate in her retirement celebration in May of 1994, and again, to par-

ticipate in the building dedication ceremony in May of 1996.

Ellie was clearly pleased by the national and local recognition these honors bestowed. Nevertheless, there was simply nothing that gave her more obvious satisfaction than the accomplishments, both personal and professional, of her present and former students. She was a teacher and a mentor to the core. Her dedication to undergraduate teaching is unparalleled. A large proportion of her students went on to earn doctorates and are teaching in colleges and universities. Ellie's teaching and mentoring were not confined to science, however. She cared deeply about the arts and literature and music, about fine wines and good food, and about the social and intellectual acumen that was supported by a broad liberal arts education. Thus, her former student Susan Munsell Hollingshead was only half joking when she said at Ellie's memorial service that two valued skills Ellie taught her were how to think critically and how to cut a mushroom—lengthwise.

Although Ellie talked frequently and warmly about her students, nothing reveals her devotion to her students more clearly than her own plans for her memorial service. It was held at Abbey Memorial Chapel on the Mount Holyoke campus, on May 3, 1997, following Thomas Reese's service in the same chapel by exactly 12 years to the day. Ellie had planned his service, as she had planned her own. It was almost entirely Ellie's students who delivered her eulogies. They came from all across the country to honor her memory. It was largely they who filled the chapel, along with lesser numbers of grieving family members, friends, and colleagues.

A former student, Jane Howard, spoke eloquently and instructively about Ellie's remarkable mentoring skills, and how she has applied them to her own teaching at California State University. Former student Leanna Standish credited Ellie with giving her the self-confidence to support a research career in the uncharted area of naturopathic medicine. Former student Susan Essock brought tears when she concluded her remarks with the statement, "So we are here to celebrate Ellie—fledged birds back for one last feast and then on to the wonders of next season's nests, our widespread songs marking the re-

markable extent of Ellie's territory." Ellie would have prized that metaphor.

Emphysema is a cruel disease, but it did give Ellie time to prepare herself, her students, her friends, her family, and her colleagues for her graceful exit. She died teaching us, by her courageous example, how to manage life's ending graciously. In the last months before her death, Ellie continued to engage in sparkling, witty conversation in her soft, deep voice. She was always quick to laugh, often doubling over in tears at a good joke, especially if the joke was at her own expense. She continued to provide fine wines and elegant meals to her many guests. She continued to order the latest books on animal behavior, and she was always ready to discuss the science of behavior. In fact, she finished two manuscripts for publication just a few days before she died.

With Ellie's death, we have lost another of our field's cherished mentors. She is interred in the historic Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, Massachusetts, not far from two of her own former mentors, T. W. Reese and B. F. Skinner.

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